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International Terrorist Groups: Turning to US Targets?

An Intelligence Memorandum

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An Intelligence Memorandum

*Information available as of 4 January 1982
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted]
[redacted] of the International Terrorism Center,
Office of Global Issues. Comments and queries are
welcome and may be directed to the Chief,
International Terrorism Center, OGI, on
[redacted]

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This memorandum was coordinated with the Offices
of African and Latin American Analysis, European
Analysis, and Near East-South Asia Analysis. [redacted]

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Summary

The kidnaping of US Brigadier General Dozier by the Red Brigades is the latest in a series of recent international terrorist incidents that portend increased security threats—particularly to US citizens—in Europe, the Americas, and the Near East over the next few months:

- Increasingly, terrorist groups are planning attacks against US citizens: Dozier was the first one the Red Brigades have ever attacked; US installations and interests in Central America appear under significant threat; and assassins directed by Libya against US targets remain at large.
- If anti-US operations prove effective, terrorist groups that share the Red Brigades' anti-American orientation—such as the Red Army Faction (RAF) in West Germany—will be encouraged to attempt attacks against US nationals.
- The extradition from the United States to Israel of Abu Eain, a Palestinian terrorist, has provided radical Palestinians additional incentive to attack US citizens; US embassies in the Near East were warned of retaliation should the extradition take place.

Worldwide, there were twice as many car bombings in 1981 as in 1980; these caused more casualties than in any year since 1968. They have not generally been directed at US targets, however, and have most often been employed in regions of the Near East where there is only a small US presence and little chance that a US citizen might be coincidentally injured. American passers-by may be at increasing risk in and around London, where the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) is again conducting bombing operations.

Although the actions of some terrorist groups may influence the future behavior of other groups, we see no evidence of a central coordinating authority. And despite the Red Brigades' call for coordinated action by international terrorist groups, these groups will probably cooperate mainly when their goals and antagonisms are congruent—as is the case with the RAF—and when such action would be operationally productive. The PIRA, for example, does not want to risk alienating that sector of US society which now provides it significant support.

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The outcome of the Dozier kidnaping by the Red Brigades will almost certainly determine whether other terrorist groups that oppose NATO policies, such as the Red Army Faction (RAF), will attack US officials in the near term. The Red Brigades' communiques on the Dozier kidnaping as well as earlier published materials indicate that they are trying to tap antimilitary, antinuclear sentiment in Italy and Western Europe. They hope to embarrass NATO and the United States and to erode the Italian Government's policies on the Alliance and nuclear weapons deployment. By prolonging the kidnaping, the Red Brigades seek maximum public attention.

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The communiques call for a coordinated or cooperative effort between the Red Brigades and other terrorist groups, specifically the RAF, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), and the Basque Fatherland and Freedom (ETA) terrorists in Spain. We believe RAF operatives have already begun target selection, surveillance, and other preparations for operations against US targets in West Germany. If the Dozier operation achieves its intended results, the RAF is likely to accelerate its preparations for an attack against a US official or installation in order to advance the anti-American objectives both groups share.

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The PIRA and ETA are less likely to attack US targets at this time. Most US officials in Spain are located outside normal ETA operating areas, and ETA members are not particularly concerned about NATO. The PIRA, on the other hand, is anti-NATO but values the support it receives from certain segments of US society, which it would risk losing should it attack US targets. There remains a threat of indiscriminate PIRA bombing in the London area that might victimize US passers-by. The PIRA launched a bombing campaign in England last fall, and in the past has attempted bombings there during the holiday season. Stringent security has limited the effectiveness of such campaigns,

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The Abu Eain Extradition Case

The US extradition to Israel on 13 December of accused Palestinian terrorist Ziyad Abu Eain, after a two-year battle in US courts, has heightened anti-American sentiment in the Near East and the threat to the well-being of US citizens there and elsewhere. US embassies in the region have been warned during the past two years that US interests would be attacked if Eain were extradited to Israel. [REDACTED]

His extradition, moreover, comes at a time of increased tensions in the Near East caused by Israel's de facto annexation of the Golan Heights, the stalemated Palestinian autonomy talks, and the reinforcement of military positions along the Israeli-Lebanese border. Even moderate Arabs point to the refusal of US courts to extradite PIRA terrorists to the United Kingdom as evidence of a US double standard on the question of extradition. [REDACTED]

At this juncture, we have no direct evidence of Palestinian terrorist plans to attack US interests. The major Palestinian organizations have not attacked any US citizens since the early 1970s. We treat with reserve reports of such Palestinian intentions provided [REDACTED] by a source of the US Embassy in Ankara, Turkey. Nevertheless, the PLO has called for "decisive reprisals" against the United States, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] US Embassies in Beirut, Kuwait, Damascus, and Ankara have increased security measures. Even if the first wave of anti-American feeling subsides without terrorist attacks, passions will rise again when the Israelis try Abu Eain. A conviction and harsh sentence would almost certainly spark reprisals against US interests. The Israelis have not yet announced a trial date. [REDACTED]

The Assassins From Libya

We continue to believe that the Libyan-directed threats against US officials are serious. Qadhafi has the assets to attempt such a mission, as well as a long record of support for international terrorism, and he has tried to assassinate foreign leaders in the past, including Sadat of Egypt and Habre of Chad. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So far, most Libyan attempts against world leaders have been thwarted in the planning or operational phase, but in some instances tight security around the intended victim has persuaded Libyan-directed assassins to call off the attempt [REDACTED]

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We believe the Libyans have targeted US officials outside the United States as well. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] We have no credible evidence, however, of direct Libyan involvement in the Dozier kidnaping. [REDACTED]

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New Threat in Latin America

US officials in Latin America remain potential targets. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The US Embassy, forewarned for several weeks, has taken steps to enhance physical security for US officials. [REDACTED]

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Added Dangers in Europe

If, [REDACTED] Armenian terrorists have worked operationally with radical Palestinian terrorists in Western Europe, a more ominous terrorist threat would exist there. The Palestinians have a well-developed support infrastructure in Western Europe, and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) is among the most capable and dangerous terrorist organizations in the world. For several years there have been indications that Palestinians have been helping to train ASALA terrorists. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] US nationals could become targets of this potentially powerful combination if the Palestinians, in reaction to the Abu Eain case, expand their target list to include US nationals and obtain ASALA cooperation. [REDACTED]

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Car Bombs

Mass-casualty-producing car bombs are a favorite weapon of international terrorist groups. Overall, there were about twice as many car bombings by international terrorist groups in 1981 as in 1980, and the resultant casualties in 1981 were higher than in any year since 1968. Although car bombs have been employed to some extent by the PIRA in the United Kingdom, for many years such attacks have been most common in the Near East. Most of the recent serious car bombings have taken place in Beirut and Syria, where only a few US citizens live. Unless US interests are directly targeted, the threat to US nationals from car bombs—whether in the United Kingdom, the Near East, or elsewhere—seems incidental and remote.

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